



NEWS

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See *MCI v. FCC*, 515 F.2d 385 (D.C. Cir. 1974).

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 5, 2014

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STATEMENT OF COMMISSIONER AJIT PAI ON MEETING WITH WLOO TV

Last week, I had the privilege of meeting Pervis Parker, the General Manager and Chief Creative Officer of WLOO TV. WLOO serves the Jackson, Mississippi market and is owned by Tougaloo College, a historically African-American college founded in 1869. WLOO is one of the few African-American owned television stations operating in the United States today.

During our conversation, Mr. Parker recounted with great pride all that his station had been able to accomplish since it was acquired by Tougaloo College in 2012. WLOO now broadcasts in high definition. It airs exclusive coverage of local high-school sports. It provides hands-on experience for Tougaloo students interested in entering the communications industry. And it is launching its own locally-originated programming.

All of this, Mr. Parker told me, was made possible by WLOO's Joint Sales Agreement (JSA) with another Mississippi station, WDBD. As Tougaloo College has put it, "the JSA has permitted WLOO to become a real success story, enabling a new, minority station owner to reinvigorate this station and expand its local services." Indeed, given the equipment failures that recently hit the station, Mr. Parker indicated that WLOO probably wouldn't be on the air today but for its JSA.

Mr. Parker therefore stated that he was very concerned about what would happen to WLOO if the FCC were effectively to require the station to terminate its JSA. He said, for example, that he would have to stop creating locally-produced programming so that he could redirect that money to hiring a small sales staff. He also observed that if there was another equipment failure, WLOO likely would not have the money to purchase new equipment, thus jeopardizing the station's survival.

On the other hand, Mr. Parker spoke with excitement of his future plans if the station's JSA were to continue. He could hire more employees, start a local news magazine program, and produce content for the regional Soul of the South network.

As the Commission considers proposals to restrict the use of JSAs, I hope that we will look past the rhetoric and base our decision on the facts. Tougaloo College, for example, is no shell corporation. And Mr. Parker is no rubber-stamp for WDBD. Tougaloo and Mr. Parker are independent innovators whose JSA gives them the breathing space to create something where nothing would exist otherwise. Moreover, the record before the Commission clearly establishes that JSAs like this one facilitate new entry into the broadcast industry, enhance ownership diversity, and allow stations to serve the local community better.

At the end of our meeting, Mr. Parker invited me to come down to Mississippi and visit WLOO. I look forward to accepting that kind invitation and heading to the Magnolia State in the future. I just hope that the Commission will make the right decision on JSAs so that WLOO will still be in business when I make it.